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Proposed Bill No. 560 – An Act Prohibiting Illegal Aliens from Having a Driver's License **Senator Dan Debicella Testimony** **February 9, 2009**

Good morning Chairmen DeFronzo and Guerrero, Ranking Members Boucher and Scribner, and members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity today to testify in favor of Senate Bill #560 *An Act Prohibiting Illegal Aliens from Having a Driver's License*.

SB-560 would amend Section 14-36 of the general statutes to require that the Department of Motor Vehicles obtain proof of United State citizenship or other legal status before issuing or renewing a motor vehicle operator's license. A driver's license is probably the most commonly used and accepted form of identification in this country. I believe that limiting access to a driver's license to those legally in this country will both increase security and encourage more legal immigration.

Increasing Security. On September 11, 2001—two hours before the planes hit the World Trade Center—a group of terrorists boarded those planes using driver's license from Virginia or Florida. Two of them obtained driver's licenses *after their visas expired and they were in the country illegally*.

Driver's licenses did even more than allow the terrorists to board the planes. The terrorists used their licenses for identification when signing their leases, opening bank accounts to finance to conspiracy, and renting cars and motel rooms. They even used their driver's licenses to "identify" themselves when paying for their pilot lesions.

While I do not think anyone can argue that 9/11 would have been prevented merely through stricter laws regarding driver's licenses, I also think it is obvious the security risk that allowing illegal aliens to get US identification poses to the people of our state and our nation.

The 9/11 Commission report specifically recommended that strict standards for the issuance of drivers license be set. As the commission detailed, “at many entry points to vulnerable facilities, including gates for boarding aircraft, sources of identification are the last opportunity to ensure that people are who they say they are and to check whether they are terrorists.”

Encouraging Legal Immigration. As a state, we need to encourage a robust legal immigrant community—at the same time we discourage illegal immigration. Immigration is an issue I take very seriously as it hits very close to home for me. I am descended from immigrants, both Italian and Irish, who came through Ellis Island looking for a better life. My mother-in-law is an immigrant from Argentina, so I know full well of the difficulties individuals and their families face when coming to a new country. From the language adjustment, to establishing residence, to finding work, coming to a new country, can be an overwhelming experience.

Requiring legal status before receiving a driver’s license will be a huge incentive for those wanting to come to this country to do so legally. In most areas of Connecticut, a driver’s license is essential to get from home to work. By restricting access to legal residents, we will encourage would-be immigrants to go through the process to become legal residents of our state and nation.

We should not confuse this bill with implementation of the federal Real ID Act of 2005, which has a much more extensive requirement of databases and national standards. This bill would simply apply what I think most citizens would agree is common sense—that you need to be in our state legally in order to obtain a driver’s license.

I urge members of the committee to support Senate Bill #560 for increased security and to encourage legal immigration.